



**United States Department of Agriculture**  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service  
Program Aid No. 1820

# The National Animal Identification System (NAIS)

## Questions & Answers



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## **Q. What is the National Animal Identification System (NAIS)?**

**A.** The NAIS is a national program intended to identify all agricultural animals and track them as they come into contact with, or are intermixed with, animals other than herdmates from their premises of origin.

Already, many species in U.S. animal industries can be identified through some sort of identification system, but these systems are not consistent across the country. Tracing an animal's movements can therefore be a time-consuming endeavor during a disease investigation, especially if the animal has moved across State lines.

On April 27, 2004, Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman announced the framework for implementing the NAIS—an animal identification and tracking system that will be used in all States and that will operate under national standards. When fully operational, the system will be capable of tracing a sick animal or group of animals back to the herd or premises that is the most likely source of infection. It will also be able to trace potentially exposed animals that were moved out from that herd or premises. The sooner animal health officials can identify infected and exposed animals and premises, the sooner they can contain the disease and stop its spread.

The NAIS will enhance U.S. efforts to respond to intentionally or

unintentionally introduced animal-disease outbreaks more quickly and effectively. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) long-term goal is to establish a system that can identify all premises and animals that have had direct contact with a foreign animal disease or a domestic disease of concern within 48 hours of discovery.

## **Q. What is the U.S. Animal Identification Plan (USAIP)?**

**A.** Before the Secretary established the NAIS, a partnership of more than 100 animal and livestock professionals from 70 associations, organizations, and government developed the USAIP. The plan laid out a framework and defined suggested data standards for implementing and maintaining a phased-in national animal identification system for the United States.

In implementing the NAIS, USDA is drawing from some of the data standards first established in the USAIP. However, the USAIP should not be viewed as an exact blueprint for the NAIS. USDA will continue to seek input from industry and other interested parties throughout the design and implementation of the NAIS.

## **Q. What's the difference between the USAIP and the NAIS?**

**A.** The USAIP was a plan created by industry and government representatives over the course



State and Federal animal health officials, such as Dr. Lynette Tobias with the cow above, will be able to manage disease surveillance and control programs more effectively and efficiently as animal identification and location records are collected through the NAIS.

*APHIS photo by Norman Watkins.*

of 2 years to address national animal identification.

The NAIS builds upon aspects of the USAIP and is the program that USDA is moving forward with in implementing national animal and premises identification. USDA will continue to seek industry input as the NAIS progresses.

### **Q. Why is a national animal identification system needed?**

**A.** A national animal identification system is needed to help protect American animal agriculture from foreign or domestic disease threats. Finding potentially sick or exposed animals early in a disease outbreak is essential to containing or eradicating the disease quickly. The NAIS will allow for rapid tracing of animals in the event of an outbreak, helping to limit the scope and expense of the

outbreak and allowing the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to minimize impact on domestic and foreign markets. The NAIS will also be critical as USDA, States, and industry work to complete the disease eradication programs in which APHIS has invested many years and millions of tax dollars.

The NAIS may have merit for producers for other reasons as well, including providing additional marketing opportunities. The NAIS will also help uphold the reputation of the United States as having healthy animals and will promote continued confidence in American agricultural and animal products.

**Q. Is the NAIS related to the Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) initiative?**

**A.** The NAIS is not being implemented as a result of the COOL initiative. The intent of the NAIS is to create the ability to track animal disease to its source and other potentially exposed premises within a 48-hour period after detection. However, animal owners may be able to use information collected under the NAIS should they wish to participate for other purposes, including the COOL program, source verification, or other marketing opportunities.

**Q. Why is 48-hour traceback capability needed?**

**A.** To protect the health of the U.S. herd, being able to track and contain a disease within 48 hours is

essential. For the industry to maintain confidence in animal health, it will need to demonstrate its ability to meet this standard.

**Q. What are the benefits for producers to participate in the NAIS?**

**A.** The adoption of a single nationwide animal identification system will help secure the health of the national herd. The program will provide animal owners and animal health officials with the infrastructure to improve current disease eradication and control efforts; protect against widespread outbreaks of foreign and domestic animal diseases; and provide infrastructure to address threats from deliberate introduction of disease.

The animal industries may integrate the standards defined through the NAIS with their management systems and performance recording programs. Using the same identification technologies for both regulatory and industry programs allows for the development of a more cost-effective and user-friendly system for the animal owner. Animal owners can also benefit from the additional animal identification information that would be obtained through the NAIS to improve production efficiencies and add value to their animals. However, the information systems would be completely separate: proprietary production data will not be transmitted to nor maintained in the NAIS information repositories.



**Q. How much will the program cost?**

**A.** It is difficult to quantify the cost of a fully operational system because all of the needed components have not yet been fully defined. During fiscal year (FY) 2004, USDA invested \$18.8 million in the NAIS, and the FY 2005 Omnibus Appropriations Act, after rescission, provides almost \$33 million in additional funding for the NAIS.

**Q. Who will pay for the identification system?**

**A.** The size and scope of this undertaking demand that it be a cooperative effort. Because it is being developed as an industry–Government partnership, it is expected that industry and the Government will share the cost of the necessary elements.

**Q. Where do producers get Premises Identification Numbers (PINs)?**

**A.** Each State's and Tribe's animal health authority (e.g., the State or Tribal Veterinarian) is responsible for administering and maintaining a premises registration system for the region under its purview. Once a system is operational in each area, the State or Tribal animal health official will obtain unique national PINs through USDA's premises number allocator.

The premises registration system will record information such as address,

contact name, type of premises, and phone number to contact the person in charge of the premises. Key pieces of information will be sent to the national premises information repository so that it will be available in the case of a disease traceback.

**Q. What forms of identification will be used?**

**A.** USDA understands that there is no “one-size-fits-all” identification technology. Many methods are currently on the market: radio frequency identification devices, retinal scans, DNA, etc.

It is likely that some technologies will work better for some species than for others. Rather than focus on a specific technology, USDA will focus on the design of the identification data system—what information should be collected and when it should be collected and reported. Once the identification system is designed, the market will determine which technologies are the most appropriate to meet the needs of the system.

**Q. Do horse owners have to eartag their horses?**

**A.** No. Species-specific working groups, which are providing input to USDA, are aware of traditional methods of identifying animals and will not recommend methods that are contrary to current practices. The goal is to provide valid identification without compromising other needs of a given species.



Horses will not need to be eartagged under the NAIS. Species-specific working groups comprised of industry and government representatives will not recommend identification methods that are contrary to current practices.

*APHIS photo by Norman Watkins.*

**Q. Where do producers get official Animal Identification Numbers (AINs)?**

**A.** Following premises registration, producers may contact an AIN Manager in their area to obtain official AINs. AINs will be issued to the premises and linked to the animals in a way that is appropriate for the species. For example, cattle producers may use eartags on their animals, while LaMancha goat producers may require a different type of identification method because their animals have very small ears.

Producers should check with their State or Tribal animal-health authority to determine whom they should contact about AINs. In many cases, the States and Tribes are in the preliminary stages of implementing the NAIS, so they may not have AIN Managers in place yet.

*Please Note: Other identification numbering systems defined in the Code of Federal Regulations will remain official through a NAIS transition period. Producers should check with a State, Federal, or Tribal animal-health authority for more information about obtaining AINs and Group/Lot Identification Numbers for various livestock species.*

**Q. Will animal owners need to have a radio frequency identification (RFID) reader?**

**A.** USDA is maintaining a technology-neutral position with regard to the technologies that will be used to identify animals. USDA is developing the standards for collecting and reporting information, but industry will determine which type of identification method or methods work best for each species.

Radio-frequency technology is one form of electronic identification that has been discussed for use with cattle. Animal owners that use RFID for official identification will not necessarily need to have an RFID reader.



The cattle working group has suggested radio frequency identification (RFID) technology be used as part of visual animal identification tags under the NAIS. Once RFID eartags, or transponders, are affixed to the animal, the electronic animal identification number can be read using a handheld reader (above) or stationary reader (at lower right on the cover).

*APHIS photos by R. Anson Eaglin.*

For example, a producer may be able to record the RFID code of the electronic device before it is applied to an animal and cross-reference the code with a visual-tag number. This would allow the producer to maintain a record of the RFID code without having to read (scan) the transponder. Industry providers may sell RFID eartag attachments on which the RFID code is printed for visual readability. While reading and recording the RFID code manually is not ideal, it can be achieved.

**Q. Who will pay for electronic identification readers and their installation in markets and abattoirs? Who will pay for the electronic identification devices?**

**A.** The NAIS plan is being developed as an industry–Government partnership, so it is expected that industry and the Government will share the cost of the necessary elements. At this point, APHIS does not envision any significant Federal funding being used for individual animal tags or other such devices. However, funding of select electronic readers could be accommodated under agreements with some cooperators. Various identification systems are currently used in the United States to identify different livestock species. The Department's technology-neutral position will allow industry to determine which animal identification method or methods are the most practical and effective for each species.



**Q. If a producer is currently using an identification program through a private service or marketing alliance, will that identification be usable in the NAIS?**

**A.** Yes, assuming the program is compliant with the official NAIS standards.

**Q. Should producers or their industry associations consider options for aligning themselves with a database management provider to ensure that they remain in compliance with the NAIS?**

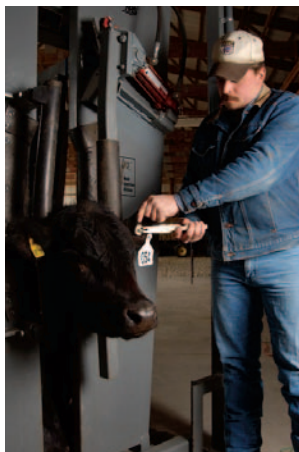
**A.** Producers are free to use any data management service they choose. Many of them provide a valuable service in managing production and marketing data to help producers maximize the profit potential of their agricultural enterprise. These companies will undoubtedly provide much-needed animal-movement data to the national animal tracking information system.

There are, however, no plans to require producers to participate in any private data-management system or align themselves with any specific data service provider. USDA would characterize such action as premature if the reason is merely to stay in compliance with the NAIS.

The NAIS will be phased in over time, and an adequate transition period, augmented with abundant public informational materials, will be established for animal owners to work into the system.

USDA is taking necessary steps to have the NAIS data standards established as official; the AIN is an example. Under the NAIS, USDA is proposing that every animal needing to be identified individually would have a unique 15-character number. Groups or lots of animals would be identified through a 13-character number, and premises would be identified through a 7-character number.

Many producers are already asking to make a move to this numbering system from the multiple systems currently in use. Accordingly, APHIS published an interim rule in November 2004 to recognize for official use the 7-character PIN, the 13-character Group/Lot Identification Number, and the 15-character AIN. This rule allows those who want to start the migration to do so, while not requiring it for others who may not be ready.



The NAIS cattle working group recommends that official tags be placed in the left ear. After the first few years of the program, identifying animals may be the responsibility of the "premises-of-birth" animal owners. Owners who lack facilities for tagging may choose to send their animals to a tagging station.

*APHIS photo by R. Anson Eaglin.*

## **Q. Who will be responsible for applying identification to animals?**

**A.** During the phase-in period, animals will need to be identified as they leave whatever premises they are on regardless of where they were born. After the first few years of the program, identifying animals will be the responsibility of the owner of each animal at its "premises of birth." For animal owners who lack equipment for individual identification, "tagging stations" will be available.

## **Q. What is a tagging station and where will such stations be located?**

**A.** A tagging station is an entity operating from a fixed location that can apply identification devices to animals that are required to be identified.

USDA recognizes that not all animal owners will have facilities to individually tag animals before they leave their premises of origin. Therefore, animal owners who are required to individually tag animals that leave the premises of origin can elect to transport animals to a tagging station. They would pay the operator of the tagging station a fee to apply individual animal identification devices and report the identification information to a central information repository. Such tagging stations may include, but not be limited to, an existing livestock marketing facility, a veterinary clinic, a fairgrounds, or a facility specifically dedicated to performing tagging services.



Animals that are shown at fairs and exhibitions, such as these alpacas, may commingle with animals from multiple other premises. Because they may be exposed to disease, they will need to be identified under the NAIS.

*USDA photo by Bill Tarpenning.*

**Q. If a person raises animals for his or her own use and the animals never leave the owner's property, do they need to be identified?**

**A.** Under the current plan, animals that never leave a premises do not need to be identified. However, animal owners are encouraged to identify their animals and their premises, regardless of the number of animals present because many animal diseases may be spread whether an animal leaves its home premises or not. Examples of such diseases include West Nile virus, foot-and-mouth disease, vesicular stomatitis, and equine infectious anemia.

**Q. If a person only shows animals or only takes them to trail rides, do they need to be identified?**

**A.** When people show or commingle their animals with animals from multiple premises, the possibility of spreading disease becomes a factor. Those animals do need to be identified.

**Q. What is "commingling"?**

**A.** Commingling may be defined as an animal having contact with, or being intermixed with, animals other than herdmates from that animal's premises of origin.

**Q. What data will USDA require, who will it be kept by, and in what form will it be kept?**

**A.** The identification of livestock premises is the foundation of the NAIS and must be established before animals can be tracked.

USDA will require the following pieces of information about registered premises: PIN; the name of the entity; appropriate contact person; street address/city/state/zip code; contact phone number; operation type; and the date the premises number was activated, the date the premises number was deactivated, and the reason for deactivation. State or Tribal animal health authorities will receive this data or have access to this data through their premises registration

systems, and USDA will store the data in the national premises information repository.

Once an animal has been assigned an AIN, USDA will be able to trace its movements and carry out efficient epidemiologic investigations by keeping a record of the AIN, the premises identification that the AIN was seen at or allocated to, the date the AIN was seen or allocated, and an appropriate event code (e.g., sighting, movement in, movement out, etc.). Additional information that can be important in a disease investigation, such as the animal's species, date of birth (if possible), sex, and breed, may also be reported. These data would be stored by USDA in the national animal identification information repository.

Some species will likely be identified through Group/Lot Identification Numbers. In these cases, producers will keep a record of the lot identification number, the premises identification where the lot identification number was seen, and the date it was seen. If species is available, this can also be provided to USDA's national animal identification information repository. Requirements for reporting these movements to the national animal tracking information repository have not been established.

**Q. Who will have access to information in the national animal identification databases?**

**A.** As part of the NAIS, Federal, State, and Tribal animal health and public health officials will have access to the information repositories when they need data to administer animal health programs at the State and national level. For example, they may access the database if a USDA program disease—such as tuberculosis or brucellosis—or a suspected foreign animal disease is reported and requires an epidemiologic investigation. They may also access the database during emergency response simulations.

**Q. What species will be included in the NAIS?**

**A.** The NAIS is being developed for all animal industries that will benefit from having a system to facilitate rapid traceback/traceout in the event of disease concern. Currently, working groups are developing plans for camelids (llamas and alpacas), cattle/bison, cervids (deer and elk), equine, goats, poultry, sheep, and swine.

**Q. Will stakeholders need more than one PIN if they have more than one species on their premises?**

**A.** No. A single PIN will be used for each location, regardless of the number of species associated with it. In other words, a producer will not have a separate PIN for beef cattle, dairy cattle, swine, etc.

**Q. Will this be a mandatory program?**

**A.** USDA and its cooperators are working toward developing a national program that will allow us to rapidly track animals exposed to a disease concern and that will meet the needs of animal owners, animal industries, domestic and international markets, and consumers.

The system needs to be tested to be sure it is effective and workable. While the NAIS is being developed and refined, producer participation will be voluntary. As the system continues to take shape and is tested for all livestock and food animals, USDA will reassess the need for making some or all aspects of the program mandatory. Some States, such as Wisconsin, have passed laws to make certain components of an animal identification program mandatory in areas under their purview.

Eventually, USDA may move toward a requirement for mandatory premises and animal identification for all species included in the system. If USDA does decide to make all or parts of the NAIS mandatory, we will follow the normal rulemaking process. The public will have the opportunity to comment upon any proposed regulations.

**Q. Will producers be able to sell their livestock if the animals are not officially identified?**

**A.** Yes, as the plan will begin as a voluntary program. Over time, some markets may require animals to be identified that are not identified now. Species for which identification is currently required will continue to have to be identified prior to entering commerce (e.g., sheep and goats under the national scrapie eradication program).

As the program is phased in, USDA will encourage owners of all animals of covered species to have premises identification, and eventually individual identification, prior to sale. For animal owners who lack facilities to apply identification devices at the premises of birth, there will be provisions for initiating the process at the point of sale.





An animal production system, such as a poultry production system, can use Group/Lot Identification if the animal owner is able to demonstrate appropriate traceback capabilities and can ensure commingling with other groups does not occur.

*USDA photo by Ken Hammond.*

**Q. Can animals be identified as a group?**

**A.** Yes, an animal production system can use Group/Lot Identification if the animal owner is able to demonstrate to the satisfaction of State animal health officials that, through group identification and production records, (1) traceback to all premises that have had direct contact with a suspect animal can occur within 48 hours and (2) the potential for commingling does not exist. Each group will be identified with a unique and standardized number. Verifiable records will be required to further

document premises identification and dates of movement.

**Q. What are the penalties for not using the program?**

**A.** At this point, the NAIS is not fully developed, and animal owners are not yet required to comply with any rules. When the plan is finished, market forces may drive those involved in the livestock industry toward participation.

**Q. What are the liability issues of this program for animal owners?**

**A.** USDA's goal for the NAIS is to enhance animal health officials' ability to trace and respond to animal diseases. The key objective is to achieve a timely traceback to minimize the detrimental effect of livestock diseases. Accordingly, USDA and the States will collect and retain only necessary identification data in the preharvest production chain and through final inspection at abattoirs. USDA emphasizes that the NAIS, in serving as a repository of verifiable data, will increase the accuracy of animal health information and will not expose producers to unwarranted or additional liability.

**Q. What is the timeline for implementing this program?**

**A.** Currently, USDA-APHIS is focused on working with its State and industry partners to build the infrastructure necessary for the NAIS to work nationwide. By August 2005, USDA anticipates that all States will be capable of registering premises and the AIN Allocator will be functioning. At that time, therefore, all producers should be able to obtain a PIN. They should also be able to start obtaining batches of AINs from approved distributors to use in identifying their animals.

In addition, during 2005, APHIS will continue to support cooperative agreements with States and Tribes that will allow various animal identification and tracking technologies to be tested onfarm and implemented, as appropriate. USDA envisions that the NAIS will continue to expand in 2006. As States and Tribes gain experience, USDA will integrate those approaches that are most successful into the broader system. USDA will also allow service providers and other participants to gear up their products, programs, and services to meet the demands of a national program.

**Q. What Government entities will have oversight of this plan?**

**A.** In keeping with the aim of the program to help safeguard U.S. animal health through disease surveillance and monitoring, which includes traceback to individual animals within 48 hours, APHIS will administer the program. Further, the plan calls for governance as a joint Federal-State responsibility with industry input. To ensure uniformity of operations across the United States, APHIS and individual State animal health entities will develop and administer key regulatory elements of the plan.

**Q. What will be the identification requirements for animals entering the United States from other countries?**

**A.** Live animals imported into the United States will require identification levels equivalent to what is required of producers in the United States for interstate movement. USDA anticipates that the NAIS will be compatible with exporting countries' systems. Imported animals will maintain their country-of-origin identification and will be tracked just like domestic livestock. The country-of-origin identification will be considered official in the United States, and the animals will not need to be reidentified.

**Q. With the phaseout of existing official animal identification devices, what will happen with brucellosis vaccination tags? Will they still be used?**

**A.** Identification numbering systems defined in the Code of Federal Regulations, such as those provided through brucellosis vaccination tags, will remain official through a NAIS transition period. It is likely that brucellosis vaccination tags will be phased out gradually as individual vaccination records are included in the database linked to each AIN. Producers should check with a State, Federal, or Tribal animal-health authority for more information about obtaining AINs and Group/Lot Identification Numbers for various livestock species.

**Q. What will happen with the National Scrapie Eradication Program's identification system?**

**A.** In 2001, APHIS accelerated the national eradication program for scrapie including, for the first time, a mandatory national identification component for sheep and goats. It has become apparent from producer and industry feedback that the current sheep and goat identification system needs to be improved in ways that will ensure compliance and improved animal-tracking capability without impeding the flow of commerce at points of animal concentration.

For this reason, APHIS is moving forward with several pilot projects to test various identification technologies that could enhance sheep and goat identification, tracking, and compliance monitoring. The technology that is most effective will be used to identify sheep and goats in APHIS' National Scrapie Eradication Program.

Because USDA is working to incorporate official identification systems already in existence, such as permanent brands, tattoos, and identification tags distributed as part of the scrapie eradication program, the scrapie eradication team is working closely with the NAIS team to ensure that the NAIS meets the needs of the industry and disease eradication efforts, such as scrapie.

With consistency being a key objective of the NAIS, AINs will



USDA is working to incorporate identification systems already in existence, such as identification tags distributed as part of the scrapie program.



*The sheep shot is a USDA file photo; the pictures of identification tags were taken by APHIS photographer R. Anson Eaglin.*

eventually become the official numbers for use in the scrapie eradication program. Sheep and goats currently identified through other official plans/programs will be "grandfathered" into the program, meaning animal owners will phase in AINs on animals identified for the first time after a mutually acceptable date.

In addition, USDA envisions that the current scrapie PINs (known as flock IDs in the industry) will be cross-referenced with the new NAIS PINs.

Currently, animal owners are still able to use their scrapie PINs. In the future, such owners will have the option to use a tag with either an AIN or a scrapie PIN and an AIN.

**Q. What are you doing to ensure the privacy of ranchers' and farmers' records? Will information collected for the NAIS be exempted from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)?**

**A.** USDA recognizes the concerns about the confidentiality of this information and is working on

options to allay these concerns. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that the national information repositories will only include information for animal and disease tracking purposes. Proprietary production data will remain in private databases.

The FOIA process can be used to obtain information from a Federal agency when that agency has custody and control of a record. USDA is very much aware of producers' concerns about the confidentiality of information collected as part of the NAIS and is taking them very seriously as officials explore the most effective means for collecting animal identification information. Accordingly, USDA is pursuing various options for appropriately protecting the information in the NAIS from public disclosure.

**Q. Where can interested stakeholders go to obtain more information about this plan?**

**A.** Information about the NAIS is available at [<http://www.usda.gov/nais>](http://www.usda.gov/nais).

**Q. Is there still time to have input into the NAIS?**

**A.** A system with this kind of scope and complexity, requiring a substantial investment on the part of both the public and private sectors, needs to be developed with ample opportunity for input by those affected. With this in

mind, USDA published an advance notice of proposed rulemaking on July 14, 2004, that, among other things, solicited comments on when and under what circumstances the NAIS should move from being voluntary to mandatory, and which species should be covered now and over the long term. The comment period closed on September 13, 2004.

In addition to accepting comments through the advanced notice or prospective rulemaking, USDA held listening sessions throughout the country. APHIS posted the comments from these sessions on its Web site at [<http://www.usda.gov/nais>](http://www.usda.gov/nais).

Eventually, USDA may move toward a requirement for premises and animal identification for all species included in the system. If USDA does decide to make all or parts of the NAIS mandatory, APHIS will follow the normal rulemaking process. The public will have the opportunity to comment upon any proposed regulations.

Stakeholders may also submit comments to USDA to be shared with one of the NAIS Issue or Species Working Groups through USDA's Web site. These groups are providing recommendations to USDA regarding the implementation of the NAIS. Contact information is available under the "Browse by Audience" section at [<http://www.usda.gov/nais>](http://www.usda.gov/nais).





